Joe Jones mural in the postoffice at Seneca, Kan., from New Deal Arts program

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FORWARDED

It Is Sensational Claptrap—Isn't It?

By Theodore M. O'Leary

"Executive Action" is offered as a "novel of fact" to counter what its authors regard as a piece of "historical fiction"—the Warren Commission report on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

This view is shared and broached by Richard H. Popkin of the University of California-San Diego, in an introduction to the novel. While Popkin doesn't vouch for the authenticity of all the novel's details, he regards it as a serious challenge to what he considers a part of American mythology. That myth holds that most political assassinations in the United States have been the work of "one lone nut" and have "no significance in terms of the forces that control American life."

Popkin cites Lee Harvey Oswald, James Earl Ray, Sirhan Sirhan and Arthur Bremmer as examples of one lone nuts. His point—that the acts of each taken together had tremendous effect upon the course of recent history—is beyond refutation. It can be

EXECUTIVE ACTION, by Donald Freed and Mark Lane (250 pages; Dell paperback; $1.25).

reasonably argued that had it not been for their acts Richard M. Nixon would never have made it to the White House twice and quite likely not even once. But Popkin fails to offer any evidence that the three assassins and the one attempted assassin were in fact anything but lone nuts. His suggestion of a dereliction by public officials in seeking such evidence has merit.

Nor is Freed's and Lane's novel, which is being made into a movie, long on documentation. What it does do is present a thoroughly engrossing and shocking hypothesis, which might be a little more convincing if you were not aware of how successfully Lane has commercially milked the Kennedy assassination. He has almost made a whole new career out of it.

The hypothesis is that the assassination was a consequence of a conspiracy on the part of Foster, an American aristocrat and "spy master" (apparently high in the CIA), right wing military men, bankers, industrialists, oil tycoons and members of the Mafia. Kennedy must be killed because he reneged on plans to overthrow Castro, is closing too many military bases, is looking toward a nuclear test ban treaty, is leading instead of fighting the black revolution, is permitting us to fall behind in the missile race and is about to get us out of Vietnam (an intention that Popkin, Freed and Lane accept more completely than available evidence substantiates but which is quite vital to the hypothesis). Foster's central fear, which he keeps to himself, is that Kennedy is a menace not because he is a socialist or a collectivist—scare words used to frighten his co-conspirators—but because he is "potentially a tyrant."

"Executive Action" (code words for assassination of a head of state) is mostly an account of the gathering and training of the assassination team that eventually strikes in Dallas. The authors also mention another team which they claim was to have tried to kill Kennedy at half time of the Army-Air Force football game in Chicago Nov. 2, 1963. At the last minute a head cold kept Kennedy from going to the game.

In "Executive Action" Lee Harvey Oswald does not shoot the President. He is a fall guy used as a diversion. Three gunmen are assigned to do the shooting. The authors imply complicity by the Secret Service, FBI and other law enforcement agencies.

"Executive Action" offers little major suspense since we know from the start what will happen on Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas. Yet the novel exudes a horrible fascination. It is also one of the most depressing novels I have read in a long time, not only because of the base motives and actions of most of its characters but because Freed and Lane seem to be writing less out of indignation than out of a warped zeal to destroy any trust that still exists among us in this country.

There was a time when I would have dismissed "Executive Action" as a piece of sensationalized claptrap. Nor do I accept its premise now. But it's a measure of what has happened in the last year or so that "Executive Action" doesn't sound quite as outlandish as it might have once. Suppose that prior to June, 1972, you had read a novel about how in a Presidential campaign men with White House connections sent burglars into the other party's headquarters, also ordered them to break into a psychiatrist's office and distributed hundreds of thousands of laundered dollars in brown paper sacks. Sounds pretty nutty — eh?

Home, Home on the Steppes

By Harold V. Cordry

THE COWBOY AND THE COSSACK, by Clair Huffaker

East nor West, border, nor breed, nor birth. When two